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BLM Alaska
FRONTIERS

News about BLM-managed public lands in Alaska

ISSUE 92 SUMMER 2004

National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska

Northwest Lease Sale Nets $53.9 million

Five oil companies submitted bonus bids totaling $53,904,491 to win rights to develop 123 oil and gas lease tracts on 1,403,561 acres in the northwest corner of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska at a June 2 lease sale in Anchorage. In terms of acres leased in one sale, it was the largest on-shore federal lease sale in Alaska.

Bids were received from Anadarko Petroleum Corp., Conoco Phillips Alaska Inc., Pioneer Natural Resources Alaska Inc., Petro-Canada Alaska Inc., and Fortuna Exploration LLC. The single largest bid of $13,745,000 was offered by Fortuna Exploration LLC for tract D-19 near the Ikpikpuk River.

"This area is far from the existing infrastructure developing along the eastern border of the reserve. We are gratified to see industry's vote of confidence and willingness to invest in the future. We are also pleased to recognize the new bidders as well as all the companies with a proven track of Arctic exploration and development," said BLM-Alaska State Director Henri Bisson.

BLM traditionally takes approximately 90 days to evaluate the bids before officially awarding the leases.

The bonus bids, along with annual rental payments, are split 50/50 between the federal government and the State of Alaska to aid the impacted communities. BLM estimates that annual rental payments could generate more than $4 million dollars per year.

As a result of an order issued in federal district court May 28, Bisson said BLM cannot permit any surface occupancy, including seismic activities, on any leases issued until the litigation is resolved and the court rules on the merits of the case.

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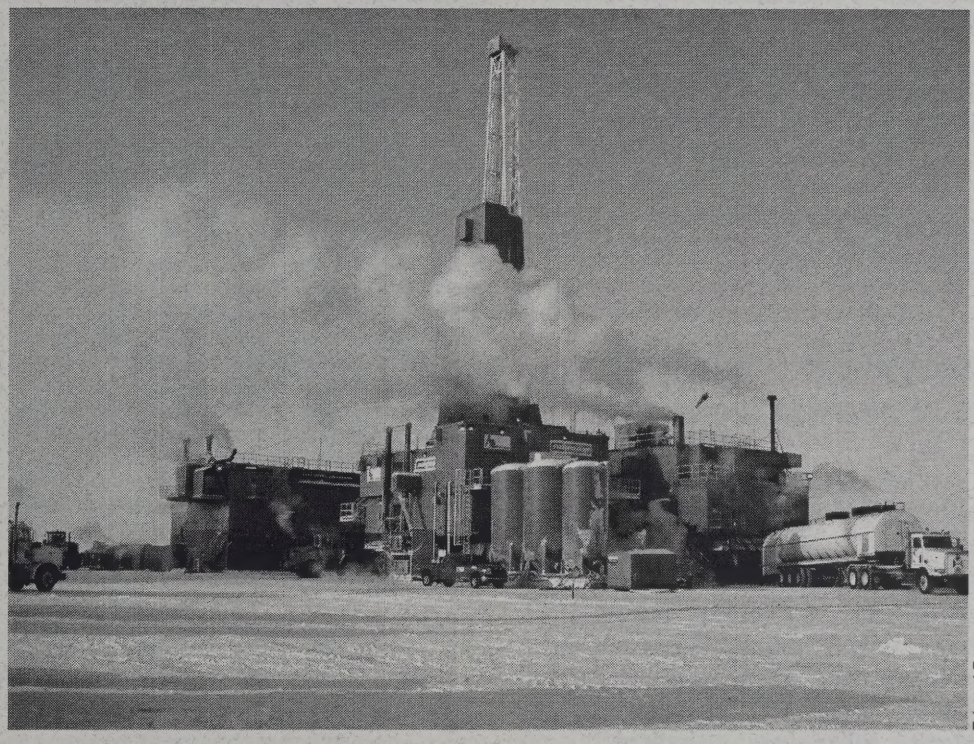

Edward Bovy

It may take awhile, but exploration is moving west in the National Petroleum Reserve. Two companies drilled at four locations in or near the northeast part of the reserve last winter.

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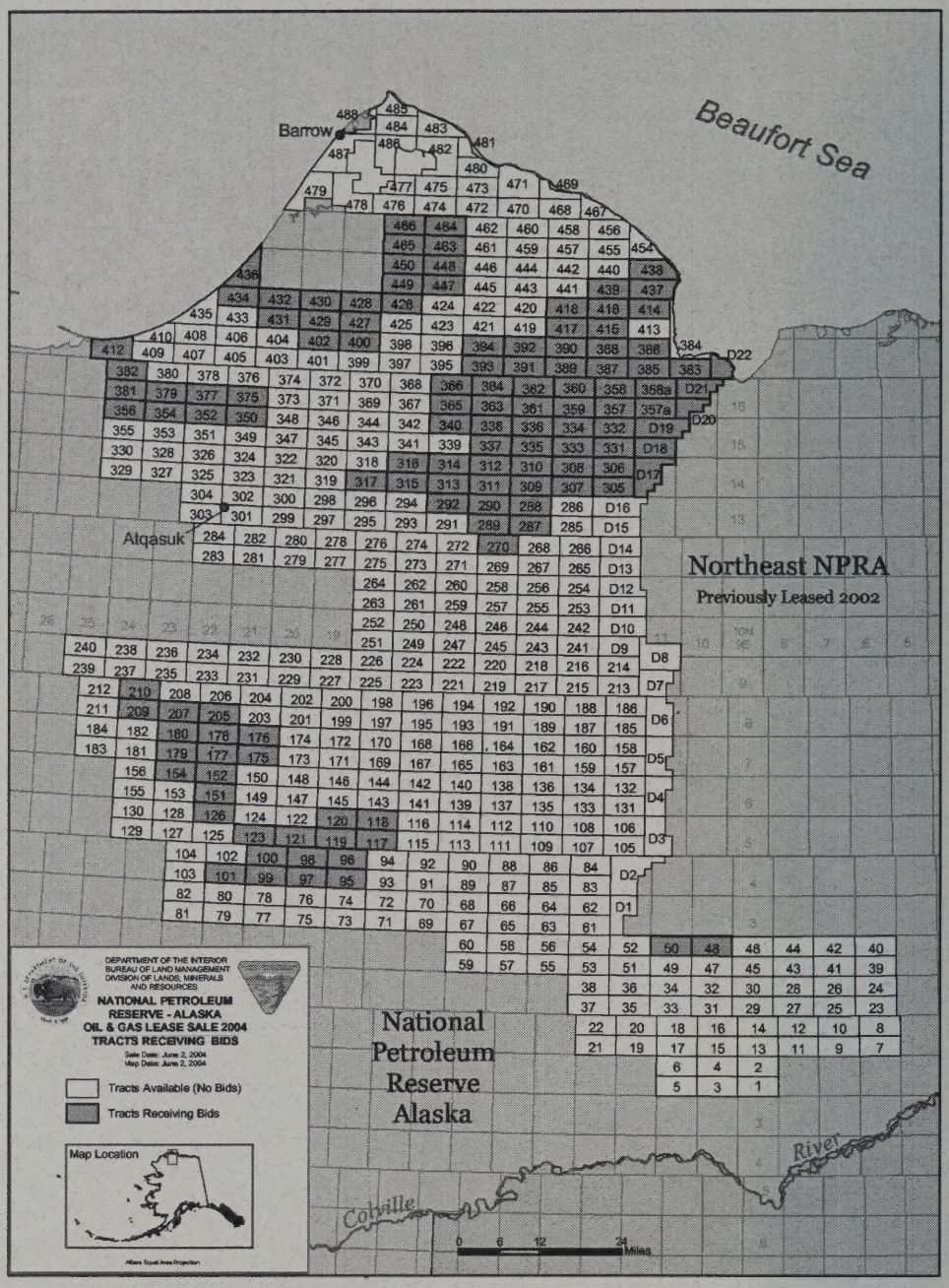
Lease sale, *continued*

This is the first time industry has bid on tracts in the northwest part of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska since the previous sales held 1982-84. In 2002, the U.S. Geological Survey estimated that the reserve, as a whole, could contain as much as 5.6 billion barrels of economically-recoverable oil, based on a selling price of $30 per barrel. Most of this is thought to be associated with geologic structures closest to the coast.

The lease sale followed a two-year planning process. "This plan will help us implement Congressional direction to maximize the production of the oil and gas resources in an environmentally-safe manner while protecting important biological, subsistence and cultural values also found in this area," said Bisson.

Complete details of the lease sale bidding are posted on the BLM-Alaska home page, www.ak.blm.gov.



Behind the scenes of BLM's latest lease sale

BLM land law examiner Carol Taylor reasoned that if BLM was going to have a lease sale, then BLM should run the lease sale. That was not the case in 1999 and 2002 when the Minerals Management Service handled BLM's lease sales for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. Despite MMS's demonstrated expertise in holding lease sales (offshore) Taylor thought it was time for BLM learn how to preside over its own sale. She says, "We needed to do it. It's BLM's sale. BLM should run it."

In early April, BLM staff met with MMS to discuss the sale and solicit help from MMS employees Steve Flippen and Jan Stan. As the sales coordinator, Taylor knew what to expect having worked at the other lease sales. She also has extensive background in land law adjudication from her many years as a contact representative in BLM's public room. But she was mostly relying on 13 co-workers in the Division of Energy and Solid Minerals to make things happen. Two employees from budget finance and two employees from the BLM's public information center were also involved.

A preliminary meeting in April gave way to a mock sale in mid-May where staff handled 50 bids from fictional oil companies. State Director Henri Bisson did a dry run for his role, practicing reading the bids processed by employees at the "head table." Other employees operated computers to project bids on tracts on a map for everyone to see. Once read, bids were taken behind a closed secure work room to be tallied and verified. These employees arrange bids by tract, enter data into an Excel spreadsheet, calculate 1/5 of the bid which is due to the BLM at the conclusion of the actual sale and make sure bid forms and checks are correct. Important information

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In 2004, as America celebrates the 200th anniversary of the Lewis and Clark Expedition, Alaskans can take pride in our own state's great journey of discovery, the Allen Expedition of 1885. Though it occurred eight decades later, it has sometimes been called

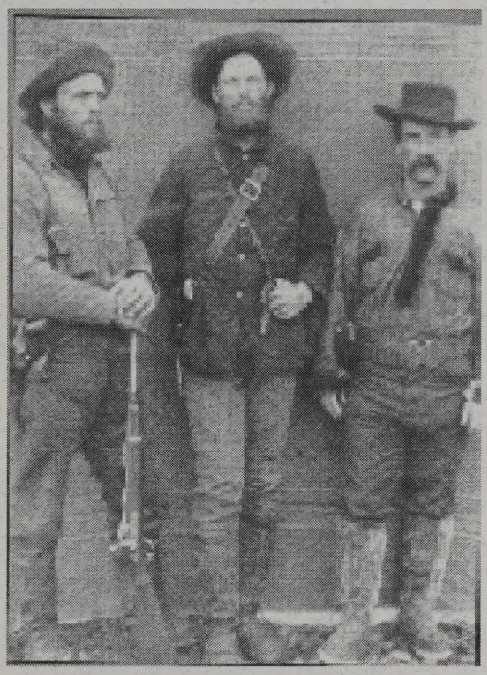
Alaska's 'Lewis and Clark Expedition'

by Robert E. King

The 1885 Allen Expedition also entailed exploration of uncharted terrain and resulted in many new discoveries. It was the first time westerners traveled from the coastal regions of south-central Alaska northward through the Alaska Range into the Yukon drainage. From there the expedition continued westward to the Bering Sea — completing a total of 1,500 miles in less than 20 weeks. It was a remarkable achievement.

Allen's distinguished career

Henry Tureman Allen, born in 1859 in Kentucky (11 years prior to the death of the last member of the Lewis and Clark Expedition), graduated from West Point in 1882. During the next 41 years, he would serve his country in various military capacities, ending his distinguished career as commander of the American Occupation Forces in Germany during 1919-1923 after World War I. Yet arguably his most exciting assignment was one he received in his mid-20s as a young lieutenant serving as an aide to veteran Indian fighter, Gen. Nelson A. Miles. In 1880, Miles was put in charge of the U.S. Army's operations in the Pacific Northwest. This was after leading numerous campaigns against Indians in the American West, including the Cheyenne, Comanche, Sioux tribes under Sitting Bull (who defeated Gen. Custer in 1876), and Chief Joseph and the Nez Perce in 1877. However, Miles had other interests as well, including exploration. He was fascinated with reports of Alaska Territory and in 1883 sent Army Lt. Frederick Schwatka on an expedition to explore the Yukon River basin, an area only partly traversed earlier by the Russians, British and Americans. The trip was a success.



Lt. Henry T. Allen (center) along with Pvt. Frederick Fickett (left) and Sgt. Cady Robertson (right) completed an historic 1,500-mile exploration into the interior of Alaska almost 120 years ago.

A dangerous plan

With the encouraging results of the Schwatka Expedition, Miles set his sites on a new and much more ambitious goal to explore an area of Alaska where no westerner had successfully gone before — the Copper River country and points beyond. The plan was to send a party to ascend the Copper River and find a passable route through the unexplored Alaska Range to the Yukon drainage. If successful, it would be a major achievement.

The trip was not without danger and uncertainty. Earlier, at least three groups of Russian explorers had perished in the Copper River country, where the Ahtna Indians of the Copper River were known to be fiercely territorial. Also, no British or Americans had successfully made the formidable journey despite some attempts. To Miles and the military, it was a challenge with no guarantee of success. It was in this less-than-optimistic setting that the Allen Expedition was launched and its start clouded even further.

Lt. Allen was not Miles' first choice to follow up on the successes of the more modest Schwatka Expedition. That assignment had gone to Lt. William Abercrombie who left in 1884. But as weeks passed with no word of his fate, Gen. Miles became concerned and sent Lt. Allen to investigate. Accordingly, he sailed

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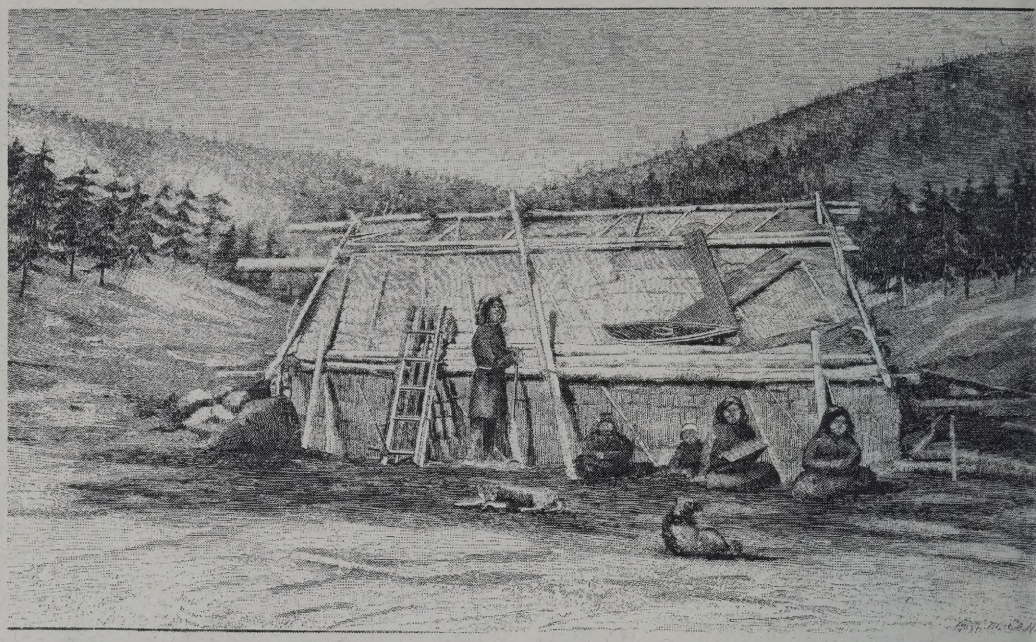
Allen expedition, *continued*

north in late 1884, thereby getting his first taste of adventure in Alaska. While Abercrombie and his men did return safely, they nonetheless failed in their quest. Abercrombie's report painted a gloomy prospect for further exploration in the region. He concluded that the route they had tried to pioneer was not practical due to overwhelming obstacles of high mountains, glacier-filled valleys, and daunting rivers beset with swift rapids which had forced the group to turn back. This was certainly discouraging news. Had it not been for Gen. Miles' continuing interest in Alaska and Lt. Allen's newly-found excitement for the territory, it would have ended there.



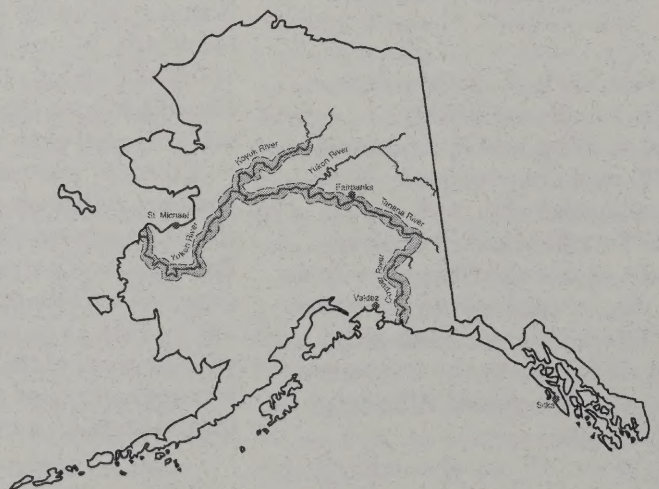
The Native village of Tarai in the Copper River drainage as seen by Allen in 1885.

A second attempt

Instead, Miles persisted and soon was able to win support for one more attempt to explore the Copper River country and beyond. But it was to be a more modest expedition of only three men. Lt. Allen was selected to lead it and he handpicked two other men to come along. They were Cavalry Sgt. Cady Robertson, a fellow soldier from his own unit, and Pvt. Frederick W. Fickett, a signal corpsman, whom Allen had met in Sitka during his trip to determine Abercrombie's fate. Both turned out to be good choices.

The small party wasted little time in starting north to Alaska. Lt. Allen received official orders on Jan. 27, 1885 authorizing the trip. Two days later the three men were on a steamer headed for Alaska. They would not return to Allen's post at Vancouver Barracks in Washington Territory until later that year. And what they did during their time away made history.

As expected, the primary purpose of the expedition was to learn about and map unknown terrain including a pass through the Alaska Range and beyond into the Yukon Basin. But there was another reason, a military one. By the terms of their official orders, Allen and his men were to report on the Native people, including information on how much of a future threat they might pose to other westerners that would later venture into this region. Memories of the ill-fated Russian expeditions lingered. Also, this was a time in America when conflicts with Native peoples elsewhere were still occurring in some areas. After Allen returned, his commander, Gen. Miles, was sent on a special mission to fight Geronimo.



Allen's epic expedition covered 1,500 miles of unexplored territory in just 20 weeks. Fairbanks is shown for reference; it did not exist in 1885.

Natives contribute to success

Thus, the military's concern for what they might face in Alaska was understandable given the times. But, in view of Lt. Allen being authorized only two other men for his expedition, this order to assess Natives from a military standpoint was a bit ironic. Later, it would become even more ironic in light of how well Allen and his men were treated by the Natives they encountered. Had it not been for the Alaska Native people encountered, at times the small group of travelers might have perished. Similar situations occurred during the Lewis and Clark Expedition, some 80 years earlier.

With full knowledge of potential problems he might face, Lt. Allen nonetheless saw this trip as a great opportunity. The expedition eventually succeeded where all others before them had failed. Not only did Allen and his men record information on the people they encountered, but they became trusted enough by Ahtna Chief Nicolai that he led them up the Chitina River to a secret outcropping of nearly pure copper. Allen's record of this remarkable place helped inspire later searches for copper in the region leading to the later discovery of the Kennecott Copper Mines, one of the richest deposits of high grade copper ever found in North America.

Among the other notable discoveries made by the men was Suslota Pass, a usable route from the Copper River County into the Tanana and Yukon Valleys. Most remarkable of all was their mapping for the first time of the Copper, Tanana and Koyukuk Rivers. And all this in less than 20 weeks while traveling overland for more than 1,500 miles!

Allen's group had lots of help from various Alaska Natives along the way. These residents of Unalakleet were considered "members of the crew" for a portion of the trip.

An invaluable report

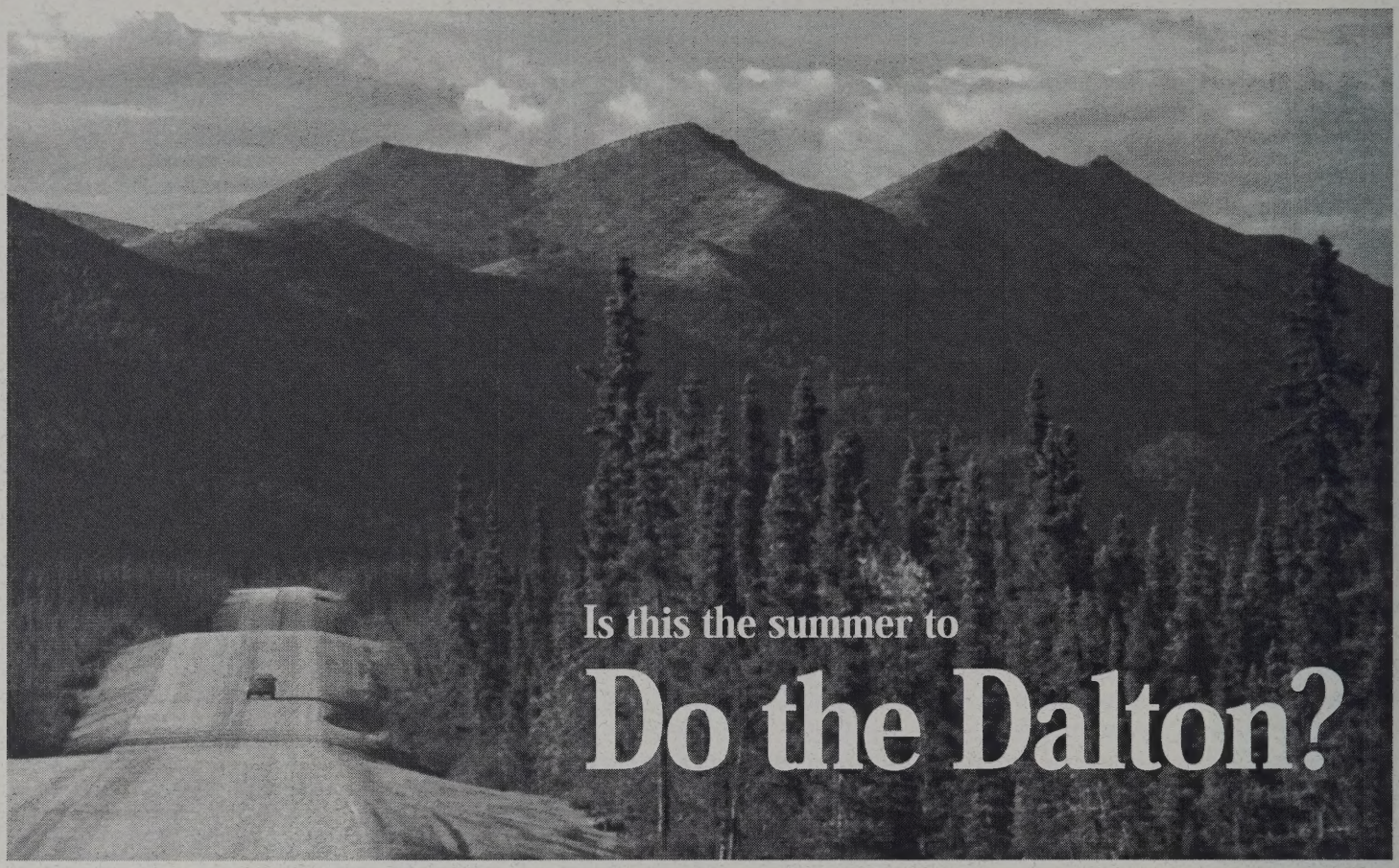
Two years after their return, Lt. Allen completed an impressive 172-page report, accompanied by detailed maps. It was modestly titled "Report of An Expedition to the Copper, Tanana, and Koyukuk River, in the Territory of Alaska, in the Year 1885, for the Purpose of Obtaining all Information Which will be Valuable and Important, Especially to the Military Branch of the Government." While the document contained around 20 illustrations, including sketches of terrain they encountered as well as depictions of some Natives, Allen and Fickett were greatly disappointed by one unfortunate event. They had brought along a camera, but the numerous glass-plate photographs they made with considerable effort were later lost by a messenger.

Today, Allen's well-written report remains an invaluable document for Alaska. It provided not only a history of prior exploration in the Copper, Tanana and Koyukuk River areas including oral history anecdotes, but a compelling narrative of their harrowing trip. It also recorded invaluable observations about the Natives encountered along the way and their cultures, which were already undergoing changes due to contact with outsiders. Allen, not unlike early cultural anthropologists of the time, even speculated on connections between various peoples of Alaska and their prehistoric movements based on "general appearance and manner."

In addition, Allen's report included observations on animals, geology, volcanic activity, glaciers, minerals, and even the weather. Altogether, the Allen Expedition created the first written record for much of interior Alaska, remarkable accomplishment that places it among the greatest journeys of discovery in American history. It was indeed Alaska's own Lewis and Clark Expedition!

This map from the official 1887 Allen Expedition report shows the lower portions of the Copper River.

Footnote: While Robert King, BLM's State Archaeologist for Alaska has great admiration for Lt. Henry T. Allen and the remarkable achievements of his expedition, he also has a special interest in the Lewis and Clark Expedition as he is a distant relative of Meriwether Lewis.



Is this the summer to

Do the Dalton?

The Dalton Highway, still known by some as the "Haul Road," evokes powerful images for Alaskans who remember construction of the Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

It was a place of jackknifed tractor-trailers, blinding snowstorms, windshields smashed by fist-sized rocks, and axle-deep mud.

The road didn't sound like a place to take a vacation. And—for a long time—it wasn't.

By Craig McCaa,
BLM Northern Field Office

Photos by Dennis R. Green,
BLM volunteer

The 414-mile-long gravel highway was designed and built in 1974 as an industrial support road, a way to transport oilfield supplies to Prudhoe Bay and to build and maintain the Trans Alaska Pipeline. Although limited tourism was allowed on a permit basis starting in the late 1980s, the highway wasn't fully opened to the public until late 1994. Even in the late 1990s, most vehicles on the road belonged either to Alyeska Pipeline Service Company or to trucking companies.

Since then much has changed. Nearly 30 years after its construction, the Dalton Highway still provides the only road access to Alaska's North Slope oilfields, but it also has become a gateway to some of North America's most stunning scenery. Its opening to the public, as well as gradual improvements to the highway and its facilities, has led to a stream of visitors from all over the world. They travel by tour bus, bicycle, motorcycle, RV, or plane for a chance to see the top of the continent. And while the number of visitors remains modest — the visitor center in Coldfoot received around 7,000 visitors in 2003 — land managers and the tourism industry expect this number to increase.

The highway starts near the mining town of Livengood (84 miles north of Fairbanks) amid rolling, forested hills. It crosses the Yukon River and Arctic Circle and winds through the rugged Brooks Range before traversing the North Slope to the Arctic Ocean. Step off the road, climb over a hill, and you're truly in the middle of nowhere.

The BLM manages a swath of public lands along the highway and nearby pipeline from the Yukon River to the north side of the Brooks Range. This has placed the agency at center stage in the ongoing evolution of the highway from its industrial

roots toward a future that includes tourists and many other users.

From gravel to pavement

Cal Westcott, an outdoor recreation planner with the Northern Field Office, has had a front-row seat from which to observe this transformation. He first traveled up the Dalton Highway in 1986. That trip ended prematurely with a head-on collision with a semitruck, but during the last 18 years, Westcott figures he has logged nearly a half million miles driving up and down the highway.

Westcott has since worked on many of the improvements BLM has added to make the Dalton Highway more user-friendly for tourists. These improvements include interpretive signs at pull-outs, 24 outhouses, an RV dump station, one developed campground with potable water and 27 campsites, and 300 undeveloped camping sites with outhouses and trash containers

He has also watched one of the biggest changes to the highway, one that is instantly apparent to those who traveled the highway years ago, when the bone-rattling gravel road alternated between blinding dust and slick mud. Now more than 75 miles of road, from the Yukon River to Coldfoot, have been paved.

Or, more accurately, resurfaced with a high-float emulsion. Original plans called for the Alaska Department of Transportation to pave nearly the entire highway by 2006. That schedule has now been set back by changing priorities in the state's budget, but the trend is clear — in the not too distant future, the entire Dalton Highway will be paved.

Meanwhile, the high float section north of the river, in addition to newly paved sections of the Elliott Highway, has left only 90 miles unpaved between Fairbanks and Coldfoot.

Even if paved sections now leave travelers with fewer flat tires, cracked windshields and accidents, the Dalton Highway remains a rugged road through a very remote area. Poor preparation, bad weather or inattention can still lead to a hefty towing bill ... or worse!

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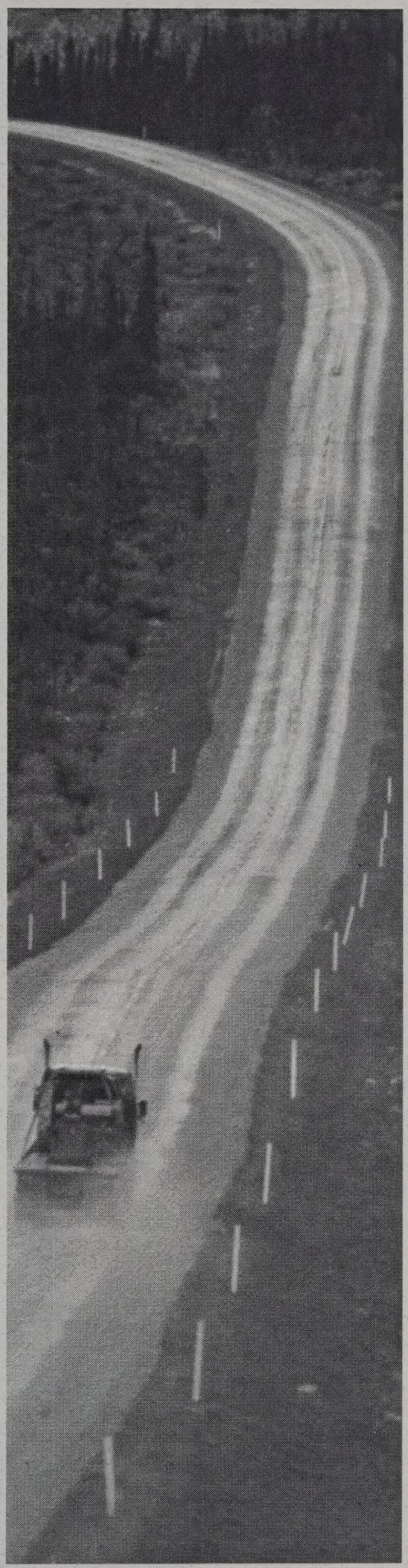
Craig McCaa



The granite tors at Finger Mountain are said to have guided bush pilots many years ago. (right) **Always remember that you must be prepared for encountering heavy duty truck traffic on the highway at any time.**

Dalton, *continued*

And visitors intent on a road trip adventure sometimes forget that the road is still heavily used for its original industrial purpose. Trucks and heavy equipment can be encountered around every turn.

"People have the tendency to stop in the middle of the road to look at the wildlife and scenery," Westcott says. "That makes the truckers real nervous."

He also adds that the recent road improvements are largely confined to the southern half of the highway. "The highway north of Coldfoot is still the same. It hasn't changed much up there."

A new visitor center in Coldfoot

One of the most visible symbols of the Dalton's maturation as a tourist destination is the state-of-the-art, 6,500-square-foot Arctic Interagency Visitor Center opening this summer in Coldfoot, a small town in the Brooks Range roughly halfway between Fairbanks and Prudhoe Bay.

The Arctic Interagency Visitor Center comes from humble beginnings. When the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and BLM set out to provide tourist information in Coldfoot back in 1988, they began with a one-room, converted barracks building.

"That first year it was just a shell with a roof on it," recalls Westcott. "We had black Visquine for walls. It was real dark in there!"

The old visitor center eventually became too small to support the increasing numbers of summer tourists. After years of preparation, the new building went up in 2003. The staff moved in last July, in time to offer late-summer visitors full use of the center's spacious information counter, trip-planning area, temporary exhibits, bookstore, auditorium and indoor plumbing (the latter a rarity along the highway!). In October the permanent exhibits were installed.

Not long afterward, the building started its first cold-weather test, in a place with some of the coldest recorded temperatures in North America. Designed to "go cold" — in other words, to remain completely unheated during Coldfoot's long winters — the innovative building will save the visitor center's funding agencies the considerable expense of heating, staffing and maintaining a remote facility during the winter months, when very few visitors pass through Coldfoot.

Lenore Heppler, BLM's project manager for the visitor center development, reports that the building weathered its first winter in fine shape. "The pipes are fine, the septic is fine — it works," says Heppler.

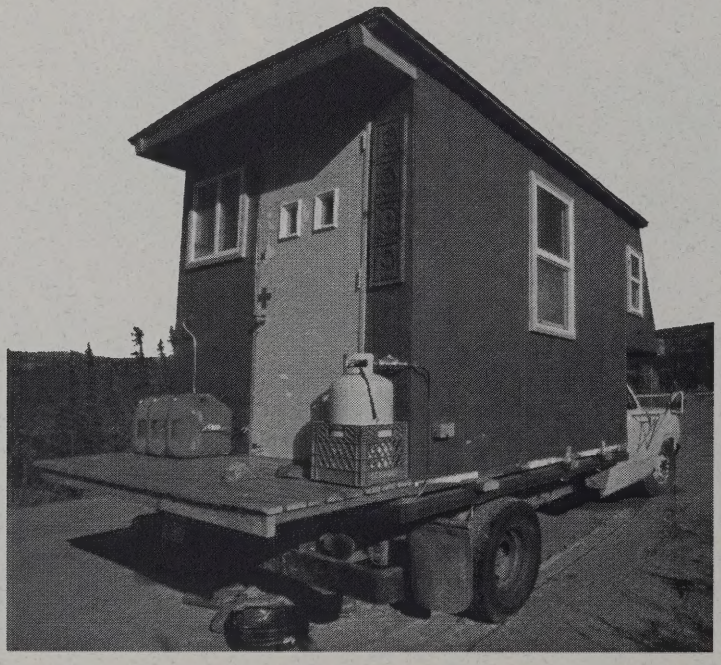
On June 29 the visitor center will kick off its first fully operational summer with a grand opening ceremony open to the public (see story on page 11).

Gift shops or wilderness?

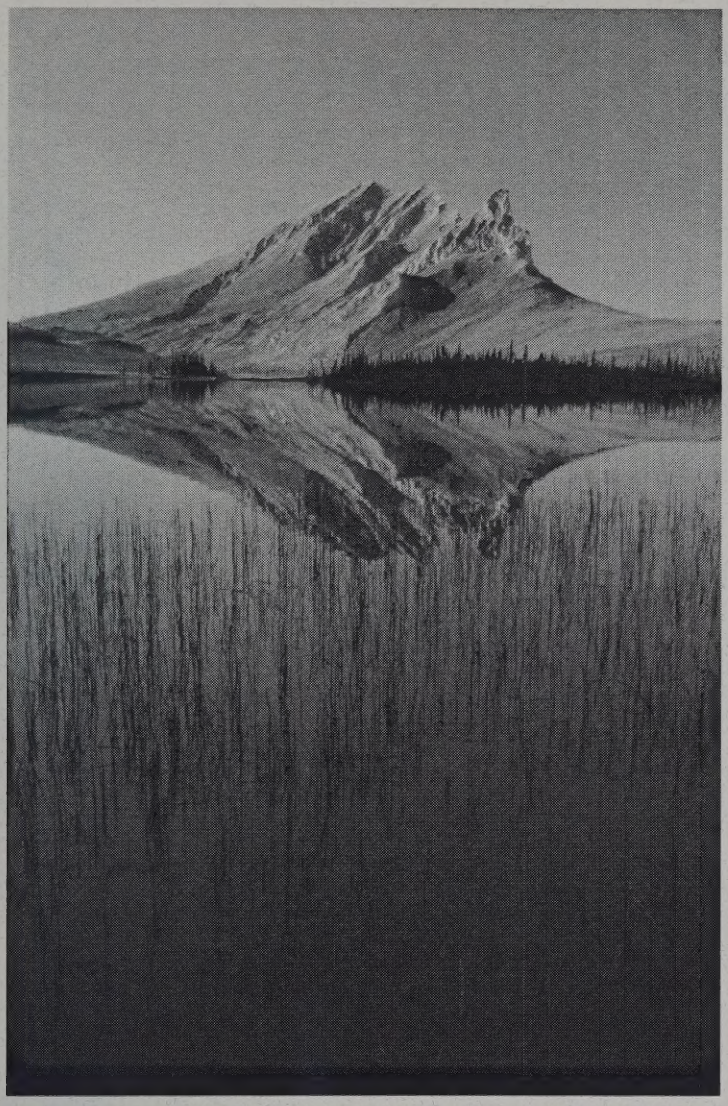
Situated at the current end of the pavement, the visitor center in Coldfoot also sits poised between two visions of how the Dalton Highway's visitor services should be developed. Visitors often use the word "adventure" in describing their Dalton Highway trips, but they differ widely in how they want that adventure packaged. And while some of BLM's visitor improvements have been universally acclaimed — like more outhouses — others are more controversial.

In a study that BLM helped fund in 1995, a researcher surveyed both north- and south-bound visitors on the Dalton Highway. His results suggested that many of the travelers fit into two broad categories. One group was focused on achieving a long-held goal of crossing the Arctic Circle. These visitors usually turned around before Coldfoot and returned to Fairbanks, often the same day they left. This group tended to desire more visitor facilities such as restrooms, souvenir shops and waysides.

The other group, which usually ventured farther up the highway, sought a more rustic adventure on a remote and challenging highway. Many of them opposed improving visitor services too much. As one survey participant put it, "Don't develop the road much more! It's the relative remoteness and



Although the Dalton remains an industrial support highway, vehicles of all descriptions seem to make it up the road.



Sukakpak Mountain is a distinctive landmark along the highway between miles 203-208.

Finger Mountain Wayside (mile 98) provides outstanding vistas of the surroundings in all directions.

Musk oxen are occasionally seen north of Atigun Pass.

Craig McCaa

The Arctic Circle, mile 115, is a popular destination for those wanting a short day trip from Fairbanks.

inaccessibility of the area which lured me. Large-scale improvements will destroy it."

"That's still pretty true today," says Heppler. "People who are going beyond Coldfoot are often looking for more of a wilderness road trip. On the Dalton Highway you can get to a place with no services for 240 miles. Where else can you do that? And the road access into the high Arctic is something you don't find elsewhere in the U.S."

Preserving the Dalton's rugged mystique and unspoiled views while providing for visitor comfort and safety — this is the challenge facing BLM as the Dalton Highway begins its fourth decade.

Know Before You Go

In its entire 414-mile length, **gas and repair services** are currently available only in three locations: Yukon Crossing (MP 56), Coldfoot (MP 175) and Deadhorse (MP 414). It's extremely important to bring a reliable vehicle with an extra spare tire and other emergency equipment.

Two **visitor centers** can assist you during your Dalton Highway adventure. The BLM Yukon River Contact Station, located at milepost 56, is the first. The other, farther north in Coldfoot, is the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center, run cooperatively by the Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service.

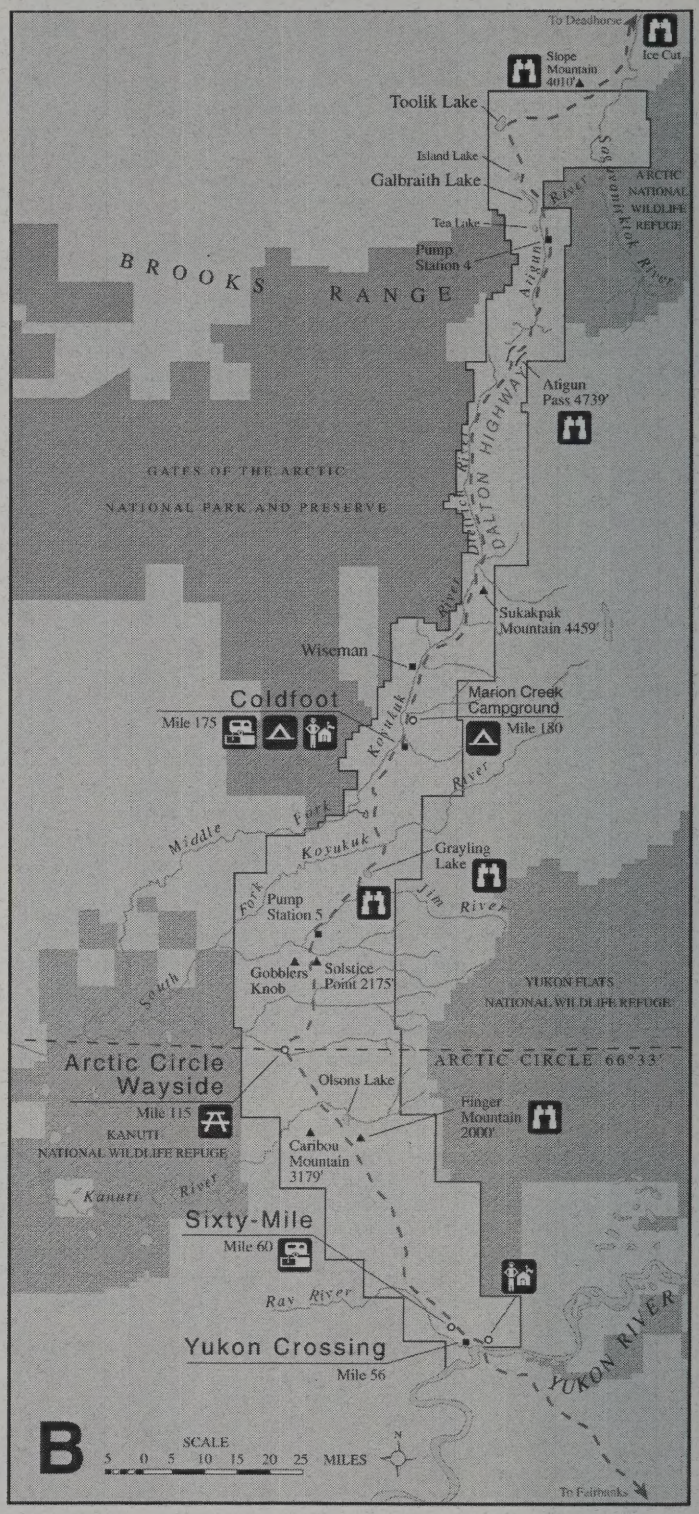
Driving times. Consider these approximate times from Fairbanks under good conditions. Add extra time for rest stops, wildlife viewing, road construction or bad weather.

Yukon River	3 hours
Arctic Circle	4-5 hours
Coldfoot	6 hours
Atigun Pass	8 hours
Deadhorse	13+ hours

Road work. The Alaska Department of Transportation has only routine maintenance planned for the Dalton Highway this summer. Drive slowly around equipment and road crews.

Oil field tours. The last 8 miles of the highway, from Deadhorse to the Arctic Ocean, is closed to the public. The Arctic Caribou Inn (toll-free 877-659-2368) offers authorized tours.

On the web. For a complete list of visitor facilities, sightseeing possibilities, and trip preparation information, visit BLM's Dalton Highway website at http://aurora.ak.blm.gov.



New Coldfoot visitor center to be dedicated June 29

On June 29, BLM will officially open the new Arctic Interagency Visitor Center in high style with speeches, outdoor booths, refreshments and activities, all open to the public.

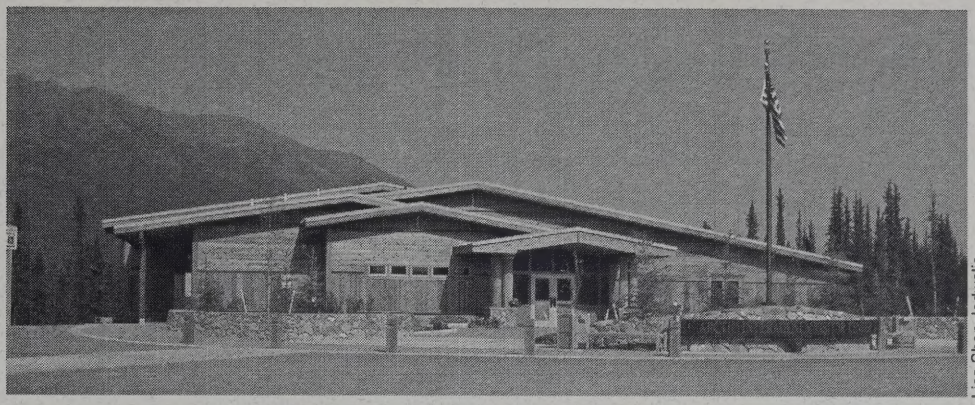
The ceremony and activities, which run from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m., will be sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management — the three agencies that cooperatively run the visitor center.

The staff of the visitor center is looking forward opening its doors to the public as well as the agency representatives who, along with Alaska's Congressional delegation, made the new center a reality.

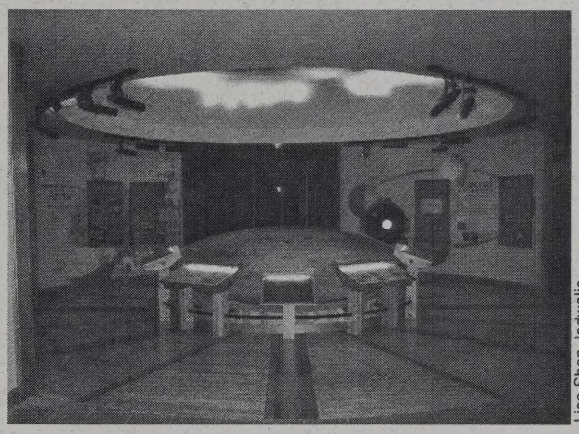
"Visitors gave us a lot of rave reviews about the building last summer," says BLM park ranger Lenore Heppler. "But this will be our first chance to show off the new exhibits that were installed last fall. I think people are going to be impressed."

The exhibits explain the natural resources, ecology and human history of northern Alaska through dioramas, three-dimensional maps, astronomical models, and hands-on displays where the curious can touch fur, bones and plants.

The visitor center is open seven days a week from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. between late May and early September. For more information about attending the grand opening ceremony, visit BLM's web site at http://aurora.ak.blm.gov/arcticinfo/invite.html.



Lisa Shon Jodwalis



Lisa Shon Jodwalis

(above) **Exterior work on the Arctic Interagency Visitor Center was completed last year to allow exhibits to be installed during the late fall.** (left) **A polar view of the Arctic is just one of many new displays created for the new building.**

Dalton Highway Major Points of Interest

Yukon Crossing (MP 56). The Dalton Highway includes Alaska's only bridge over the Yukon River. The BLM Yukon River Contact Station, located on the northern riverbank, is a helpful place to learn about road conditions, wildlife sightings, and available services.

Finger Mountain (MP 98). A finger-shaped rock on this exposed ridge once served as a landmark pointing early aviators toward Fairbanks. Learn about tundra life on the short nature trail.

Arctic Circle (MP 115). The perfect place to pose visiting relatives or friends next to an attractive sign proving that they have crossed Latitude 66 degrees 33 minutes north latitude. North of here the midnight sun stays above the horizon around the clock at the Marion Creek Campground and the historic village of Wiseman, established in 1907.

Sukakpak Mountain (MP 203). This craggy, 4,459-foot mountain is one of the most beautiful and distinct landmarks along the highway.

Atigun Pass (MP 244). At barren and windy Atigun Pass the highway crosses the Continental divide at an elevation of 4,739 feet. Dall sheep are often seen on the steep mountain sides.

Galbraith Lake (MP 275). On a clear day the snowy peaks of the Brooks Range are reflected by the waters of this remnant of a much larger glacial lake. From here the highway leaves the Brooks Range foothills for the Arctic Coastal Plain, a flat expanse of bogs, lakes and tundra teeming with wildlife.

Deadhorse (MP 414). More an industrial camp than a town, Deadhorse is the end of the public highway and a departure point for oilfield tours that provide the only way for visitors to travel the last 8 miles to the Arctic Ocean.

One Hundred Twenty-Five Miles or 125 Miles!

Since 1992, Bob and Thelma Bowser have spent their summers volunteering at BLM's Yukon Crossing Visitor Contact Station on the Dalton Highway. In 1999, the retired couple from Orlando, Fla., received a national volunteer award for their long service and hospitality, which have made them a veritable Dalton Highway institution, popular among visitors, pipeline workers and truckers alike.

We caught up with them in late May as they prepared to depart for their 13th summer at the contact station, located 150 miles north of Fairbanks.

Craig McCaa

Bob and Thelma Bowser have been helping summer visitors along the Dalton Highway every year since 1992.

What brings you back year after year?

Bob: Meeting different people.

Thelma: I think it's also the people here at BLM. They're good to us.

Bob: Well, we started out with just a cabin. Then we got a solar system. Then we got running cold water. We'll even have hot water if we get everything connected up again. A bear broke in, and he tore the copper tubing out.

Thelma: The friends at the river are nice, too. The Seven Mile gang [at the nearby DOT station] are great. And Pump Station 6.

Bob: Pump Station 6, they're great. They invite us up there Sunday nights for a meal if we want to. At Seven Mile they let us take showers and do laundry down there. They have ever since we came up.

Thelma: They're just like family almost.

Bob: We said last year, "This is our last year." Well, as long as we're in good health, we figured, "Why not?"

You've probably been asked a lot of strange questions over the years.

Bob: They ask me, "Where's the nearest gas?" I say, "Right across the street." "But the sign says it's 120 miles to the next gas." I say, "Yeah, after *here* it's 120 miles to the nearest gas."

Thelma: One time some people came in and we were talking about the pipeline and this and that. There were about 7 or 8 of us. And we started talking about the pig* that goes through the pipe for cleaning. A lady spoke up and said, "Oh my goodness – That poor pig! I wonder what shape he was in when he got out of there." Her husband bumped her on the shoulder and said, "Honey that wasn't a real pig."

Bob: There was one woman. This man was telling about how many barrels of oil the pipeline was moving. Well, she thought she could hear the barrels clanking as they went through the pipe.

Thelma: Another woman came in looking for smokes. We don't smoke and the restaurant across the road didn't sell cigarettes.

Bob: We told her it was 125 miles that way [pointing south] or 125 miles the other way. The same thing with beer. We tell people, "125 miles or 125 miles." —Craig McCaa

* Pig – a mechanical device pushed through the pipe by the flow of oil. One kind of pig uses polyurethane scrapers to clean the inside of the pipe.

Umiat getting a little cleaner

With funding secured from Congress, BLM began plugging some of the "legacy wells" in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska this spring. BLM awarded a contract to Olgoonik Environmental Services (OES) of Wainwright, Alaska, to plug nine wells near Umiat.

Umiat was the site of oil exploration conducted by the U.S. Navy, who contracted various Arctic contractors to drill 11 wells between 1944 and 1953. None of these wells were initially plugged and abandoned but the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers plugged two Umiat wells during the winter of 2002.

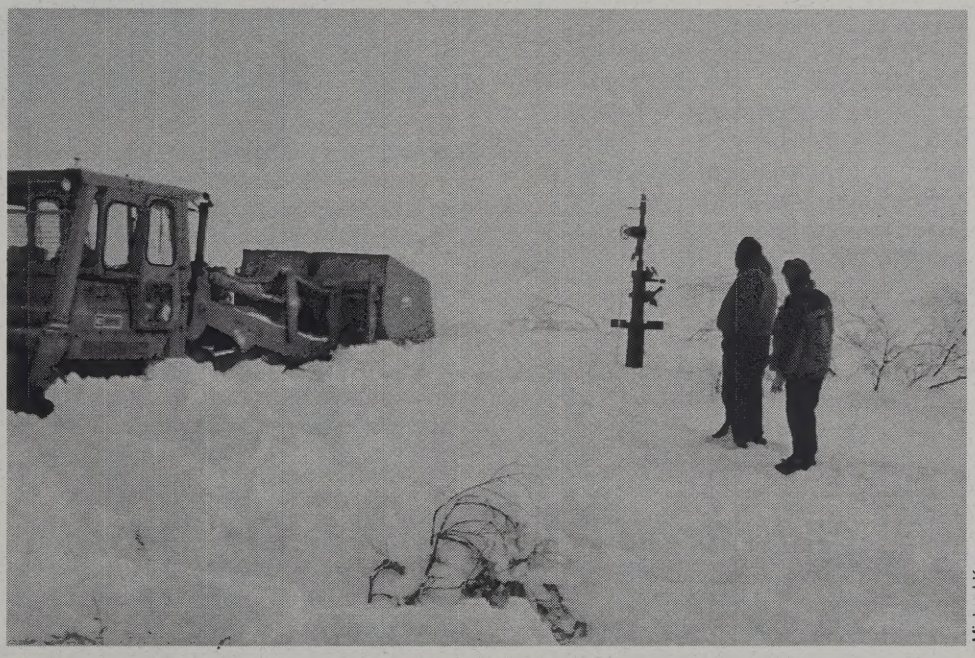
Umiat was chosen due to its proximity to the Colville River and the relatively easy access provided by the existing air strip. OES mobilized equipment at Umiat in late April and was able to plug four wells in 27 days. BLM suspended operations on May 11 to prevent damage to the tundra as the weather warmed. BLM and OES plan to return to Umiat next winter to finish plugging the remaining five wells.

Depending on future funding, BLM will plug other legacy wells in the petroleum reserve. Wells that pose the greatest risk to the environment and resource values will get priority.

After multiple field seasons collecting field data and compiling literature on the wells drilled by the U.S. Government, BLM will issue its final report on the legacy wells in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska later this year.

Richard Kennitz

BLMers on the preliminary site visit to Umiat No. 6 in February were greeted with -40°F temperatures and three feet of snow.



Michael Kunz

BLMers visit Umiat No. 8 in May as crews begin scraping five feet of snow away to allow work on the wellhead.

Late breaking news...

The *Northeast National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Draft Amended Integrated Activity Plan / Environmental Impact Statement* is now available for public comment. The plan includes BLM's preferred alternative for making additional land available for leasing in the northeast NPR-A. Public comments will be accepted for 45 days beginning June 18, 2004. See BLM's website www.ak.blm.gov for more information.

A followup story will appear in the next issue of *BLM-Alaska Frontiers.*

Frontier Flashes

Recent news from around Alaska

Weather lets fieldwork start early
Cadastral field surveys got an early start this field season, departing mid-May for projects located in the Rainy Pass area. BLM surveyors will work on the Lime Village and Port Alsworth State Section project most of the summer. Also scheduled are Bureau of Indian Affairs-funded projects at Nenana, Naknek and Fort Yukon. Survey contracts totaling $7.5 million dollars will be awarded during the coming weeks for summer field work. BLM contract inspectors will monitor approximately 25 projects scattered throughout the state.

Alaska air tanker fleet reduced
Two of Alaska's four large air tanker contracts have been cancelled this summer because of safety concerns. Nationwide, the Forest Service and BLM have cancelled the use of 33 tankers. Helicopters and smaller, single-engine aircraft will partially fill the void. Two large air tankers used by the State of Alaska are unaffected by the cancellation.

BLM releases preliminary mineral report on Aniak Mining District
BLM-Alaska Open File Report 94, *Mineral Investigations in the Aniak Mining District, Southwestern Alaska, 2003 Field Season*, is available on line at http://juneau.ak.gov/ma/aniak/html. The report is also available on CD and in hard copy by request from the Juneau Mineral Information Center (907) 364-1554. The report contains geochemical data on 351 samples collected last summer as part of BLM's ongoing mineral assessment program.

BLM completes two land exchanges
In March BLM issued an interim conveyance, transferring 47,291 acres on **Adak Island** to the Aleut Corp. in exchange for equal acreage from the corporation's ANCSA entitlements in the **Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge**. The complex land exchange grants the **Aleut Corporation** long sought-after lands and infrastructure, closes a former navy base, and adds valuable wildlife habitat to the wildlife refuge.

Chris Hayes

BLM and Fort Richardson cooperated to remove grass and brush from a 10-acre parcel and a 400-acre parachute training landing area with a controlled burns in May. The burns reduced the fire hazard and improved the safety of the drop zone for training.

In late April, a key interim conveyance was issued for a land exchange that provides lands to relocate the village of **Newtok** where pervasive coastal erosion is a problem. Congress passed legislation last year authorizing BLM to convey 10,943 acres on Nelson Island to Newtok Corporation. It will serve as the new site for the village.

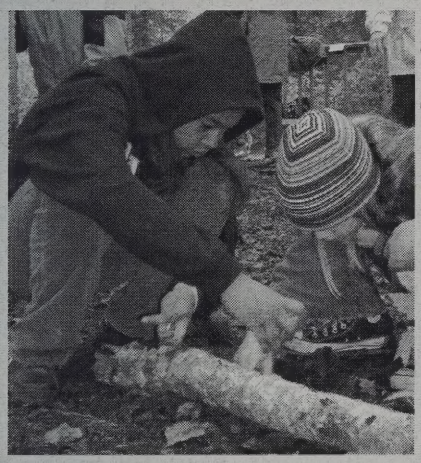
BLM helping PBS learn about homesteading
BLM-Alaska archaeologist Bob King is assisting a Nebraska public television station develop a documentary on homesteading. The PBS station will be in Alaska in June to interview homesteaders and land claimants. The last Alaska homestead was patented in 1986.

BLM conveyed the Knik River Access Gravel Pit Lake area to the State of Alaska on June 10. The 255-acre parcel is adjacent to the Glenn Highway Knik River Bridge between Anchorage and the Palmer/Wasilla area and is within the boundaries of the Palmer Hay Flats State Game Refuge. This easily-accessed area is a popular recreational site for launching boats and hunting. The State of Alaska now assumes the management responsibility for the site.

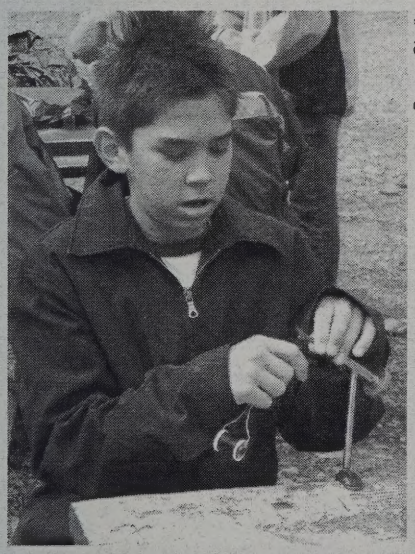
BLM's Glennallen Field Office has moved out of its "log cabin" into new office space in the same location. An official dedication and open house is being planned for the fall.

Original design by Debbie Dubc

BLM's Anchorage Field Office and the Anchorage School District celebrated the 30th anniversary of Outdoor Week in May. During the past three decades, more than 60,000 sixth-grade students have learned about natural resources in the annual interagency outdoor classroom event. Special guests this year included Anchorage Mayor Mark Begich and founders Emma Walton and Joette Storm. (below) Students look for insects and learn to tie fishing flies.



Donna Gindle



Donna Gindle

BLM Seeks Public Comment on East Alaska Resource Management Plan

Resource specialists at the Glennallen Field Office are currently developing proposed management actions, guidelines, and allowable uses to meet goals and objectives identified from last fall's public scoping for the East Alaska Resource Management Plan (EARMP).

Proposals include actions to address trail and off-highway vehicle management, wildlife habitat protection and management, identification of areas open for mineral leasing or location, and identification of criteria to be used in making future lands/realty decisions. An extensive series of public meetings were held during April and May in Slana, Eureka, Glennallen, Chitna, Eureka, Palmer, Anchorage, Gulkna, Kenny Lake, Chistochina, Paxson, Delta, Fairbanks, Cantwell, Yakutat and Cordova.

"These are important decisions that will shape the course of management on BLM lands for the next 15-20 years," notes EARMP leader Bruce Rogers, "and we need the public's continued input to develop a plan that reflects the public's interests and concerns."

The draft plan is scheduled to be released Sept. 30. Visit the Glennallen Field Office website at www.glennallen.ak.blm.gov and click on "land use planning' to link to the latest East Alaska updates.

The Northern Field Office completed a round of public meetings this spring for the **Kobuk-Seward Peninsula Resource Management Plan**. Meetings were held in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Shaktoolik, Nome, Koyuk, Kiana, Kivalina, Kkotzebue and Buckland. The plan will guide BLM's future management on more than 13 million acres of public lands in western Alaska. A draft plan and environmental impact statement are expected in October, 2005.

The BLM's Anchorage Field Office is preparing a plan documenting how it will prepare **The Bay Resource Management Plan**/Environmental Impact Statement. The preparation plan covers items such as the anticipated issues, preliminary planning criteria, schedule, public participation, staff needs and budget. The Bay planning area includes BLM-managed public lands in the Bristol Bay and Goodnews Bay areas.

BLM's Anchorage Field Office is also writing the **Ring of Fire Resource Management Plan**/Environmental Impact Statement. Public scoping meetings have been held and the planning team is now evaluating comments and developing alternatives for analysis. The project website is www.alaskaring of fire.com.

Lease sale, *continued from page 2*

about highest bidders and unsuccessful bids also come from this group.

On the morning of June 2, BLM contact representatives Janie Fisher and Peggy Richardson carrying bids were escorted to the Lousacc Library by BLM rangers Mimi Rogers and Brad England. Although the sale would not begin until 8:00 am, the place was already buzzing with BLM staff hooking up computers and getting ready for the sale.

In the end five oil companies bid millions of dollars to develop 123 oil and gas lease tracts on 1,403,561 acres in the petroleum reserve. No equipment malfunctioned, no missteps were realized and the companies' paperwork was in order. BLM's minerals staff was proud of a job well done and knows it will be ready for the next sale, whenever that will be. —Danielle Allen

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We're back... There was no spring issue of *BLM-Alaska Frontiers* this year. The entire public affairs staff was stretched thin hosting two major national conventions in March. We hope you enjoy this special 16-page issue.